

Press Club 16 DEC 2002

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THANK YOU FOR JOINING US. THE WORK YOU DO IS CRUCIAL, AND I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK YOU FOR MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO COMMUNICATE TO THE GOOD PEOPLE OF KOSOVO.

ON BEHALF OF ALL THE SOLDIERS OF MULTI-NATIONAL BRIGADE EAST, I WANT TO BEGIN BY EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES TO THE VOKSHI (VÖK-SHEE) FAMILY FROM POLICKA VILLAGE FOR THEIR TRAGIC LOSS OF YOUNG LIFE. THE ACCIDENTAL LOSS OF ANY LIFE IS TRAGIC, BUT THE LOSS OF CHILDREN AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE IS ESPECIALLY HEARTBREAKING.

THE INCIDENT "SHOULD REMIND US OF THE DANGER REPRESENTED BY EXPLOSIVES THAT ARE STILL PRESENT IN KOSOVO. IT REITERATES THE RESOLVE AND COMMITMENT OF KFOR TO CONTINUE THE MINE AND EXPLOSIVES AWARENESS CAMPAIGN." I IMPORE

PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND ALL ADULTS TO EDUCATE THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN ON THE DANGERS THAT, SADLY, STILL PLAGUE KOSOVO. AFTER NEARLY ONE MONTH IN COMMAND, I ASSESS THE SITUATION IN OUR SECTOR AS CALM AND SECURE. HOWEVER, NONE OF US SHOULD BE SATISFIED WITH THE CURRENT SITUATION—THERE IS STILL A LOT OF WORK AHEAD OF US. AS A SOLDIER, WHEN I LOOK AT KOSOVO, I SEE ONLY TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE--GOOD AND BAD. TO THE GOOD PEOPLE OF KOSOVO, I AM CONFIDENT THAT YOU WILL NOT LET BAD PEOPLE STAND IN THE WAY OF PROGRESS FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN.

THAT PROGRESS IS BEST ILLUSTRATED BY THE RECENT SUCCESSFUL MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ----- THE SUCCESSFUL GO AND SEE VISITS -----
---- A RAPIDLY PROGRESSING KOSOVO POLICE SERVICE-----AND MOST IMPORTANTLY--SLOWLY YET SURELY BUILDING A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY BASED ON THE RULE OF LAW.

MULTI-NATIONAL BRIGADE (EAST) WILL CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN A SAFE AND SECURE ENVIRONMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1244. WE WILL DO THIS IN FULL PARTNERSHIP WITH UNMIK AND CIVPOL AS WE CONTINUE THE TRANSITION TO LOCAL AUTHORITY. REST ASSURED THAT AMERICA REMAINS COMMITTED TO KOSOVO. THE THOUSANDS OF SOLDIERS ON DUTY HERE EVERY DAY ARE A TESTIMENT TO THAT COMMITMENT. AS WE ENTER THE NEW YEAR THE SOLDIERS OF MULTI-NATIONAL BRIGADE EAST WISH ALL THE PEOPLE OF KOSOVO A PROSPEROUS, HEALTHY AND SAFE NEW YEAR. THE SOLDIERS UNDER MY

COMMAND WILL DO THEIR PART TO MAKE 2003 A SUCCESSFUL NEW YEAR ---- I ASK ALL THE PEOPLE OF KOSOVO TO COMMIT TO DO THE SAME.

I NOW WELCOME YOUR QUESTIONS.

Question: How do you assess the security situation in your sector and what are your challenges ahead of you?

BG Keefe: Thank you for your New Year and holiday season's greetings to my soldiers, I'll pass that on to them. With the soldiers that we have in MNB(E), we'll continue to maintain a safe and secure environment. Transferring to Civil Authority, that's a transition through CIVPOL and KPS, is an important objective for us. It's important to note we will not do this alone. It will take the good people of Kosovo to assist us because in the end it's the good people of Kosovo that will make this democratic society work by the rule of law.

Question: A few days ago, together with the Greek Commander, you had a local Serbian operation. What was the aim, the purpose, of the visit and what do you think about returns?

BG Keefe: Well, first, the purpose of my initial visits was to get an understanding of the soldiers of my command and also to get an understanding of the region and the people in the region. With respect to the returns, I think it's first important to recognize it is an individual right and an individual choice. UNMIK has the lead on returns but MNB (E) will continue to support UNMIK and work hand in hand to set the conditions to allow returns.

Question: We heard they are going to close five shooting ranges of the US Army. Why is that? Is this a continuation of the restructuring of your forces?

BG Keefe: With respect to not only shooting ranges but also all our facilities, we continue to always assess what facilities we need. What facilities we no longer need and try to conserve our resources. And that process is continual, it goes on all the time. It goes on in all Military organizations. But as I said in my comments, make no mistake of America's commitment and we are fully capable to carry out our requirements under 1244.

Question: How did the Pristina explosion reflect (effect) your sector?

BG Keefe: With respect to specifics on the Pristina explosion it's out of my sector and therefore I have no comments on that. But I would like to go back to my opening. I'm confident in the good people of Kosovo to move forward. We can't let the bad people of Kosovo pull us back to the failures of the past.

Question: We wanted to ask you your general opinion of Strpce?

BG Keefe: Well, thank you for that question. I was in Strpce just this last Thursday and what comes to mind most to me is the recent municipal elections and it was a successful milestone not only for all of Kosovo but also for Strpce. I think it's another example of institutions, democratic institutions, taking hold here in Kosovo. Freedom of movement continues to improve. Six months ago, MNB (E) was doing 30 convoy protections. Now we are only doing two escorts and freedom of movement continues to improve. And all the soldiers of MNB (E) look forward to working with the people of Strpce and the new Municipal Assembly.

Question: The agreement between Scopje and Belgrade, they were taken apart from Skopja territory and this agreement was rejected by the Kosovans. Especially with the people that live in that Zone. You have lately any incidents in those areas?

BG Keefe: Well, first, as you know, the agreement was confirmed by the UN Security Council in March 2001. But that agreement did provide a mechanism for relief to the affected landowners. And I look forward for all of us, the international community and the people of Kosovo to move forward on that agreement. And with respect to your second part of your question, I'm not aware of a significant incident in the last week in that area.

Question: Mr. General, you mentioned the campaign to de-mine the zones. How do you assess the role of TMK in this respect, de-mining the minefields?

BG Keefe: First, with respect of my initial comments, I was emphasizing the role of educating our young children about the dangers of mines and explosives. And we're doing that in the schools and in the communities, and I think that it is very important we continue that. With respect to the Kosovo Protection Corps, as you know it's an important civilian organization for emergency action in case of disaster. And they are, as we witnessed in the Gjilani earthquake, they were very effective. And all the reports I've received in the last month are very positive. With respect to your specific question, I'd ask you to refer that to UNMIK, because as you know, the KPC falls directly under UNMIK for direction. Thank you.

BG Keefe: Good Morning.

Question: Municipality of Vitina and UNMIK just recently had started a project for IDP project. This is a project for the village_____. Where KFOR is playing a crucial role for this project, do you think this project is going to be successful for 2003, and is this going to be a testament for the new projects?

BG Keefe: You know as I said earlier with respect to returns it is an individual choice and an individual right. I can only look at my own country and I know from my own experience that our strength comes from our diversity and our multi-ethnicities. And in MNB east we're committed to setting the conditions for a return and supporting UNMIK in that role. Thank you.

BG Keefe: Good Afternoon.

Question: In your opening statement, you said after a month in command the situation in your sector is safe and secure. But no one should be satisfied with the current situation. My question is, why we should be not satisfied with the current situation?

BG Keefe: What I was referring to and I think people would agree, that there are certain standards that need to be met. One of those standards is the rule of law. A key part of that is putting in to place Civpol and the KPS. But I think we'd all agree that we need to continue to improve that and to get to the point where all those standards, all the eight standards of UNMIK, are met throughout Kosovo. I think the people of Kosovo should be proud of the progress they have made. This safe and secure environment, in this region, is a testament to that. And I do just close, to ask the good people of Kosovo to continue to move forward for you and your children. In closing, thank you all again for participating. I wish all of you a happy and healthy New Year and we'll see you for next months press club.

Thank You.